

HCS HB 282 -- HEALTH INSURANCE

SPONSOR: Holand (Moore)

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "do pass" by the Committee on Health Care Policy by a vote of 12 to 1.

This substitute requires health insurance entities to provide coverage for associated hearing evaluations, consumable supplies, and hearing aids for dependent children through 19 years of age who are covered by a health policy or health plan. Coverage will begin after January 1, 2004.

The substitute:

- (1) Specifies the type of hearing aid which will be covered. The hearing aid must be prescribed and dispensed by an otolaryngologist or a licensed audiologist;
- (2) Requires that a replacement hearing aid for children be covered once every three years;
- (3) Prohibits a health insurer or health plan from establishing a benefit cap for hearing aids less than \$1,250 per hearing aid, per ear. If an enrollee chooses a more expensive hearing aid, the enrollee is required to pay the difference without a financial or contractual penalty being imposed upon the provider of the hearing aid. Health insurers or health plans are also prohibited from requesting hearing acuity information from enrollees;
- (4) Allows a health insurer or health plan to provide more favorable insurance coverage for hearing aids;
- (5) Prohibits enrollees from being subject to greater deductibles and copayments than other similar health care services provided by the policy, contract, or plan;
- (6) Exempts supplemental insurance policies; and
- (7) Authorizes the Director of the Department of Insurance to develop rules to implement the provisions of the substitute.

FISCAL NOTE: Not available at time of printing.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that working parents with insurance coverage need assistance when purchasing hearing aids and related devices. Rapidly changing technology for hearing aids and other devices is one factor resulting in increased costs for these devices. Children affected by hearing loss should be given the

opportunity to have hearing aids which will improve learning, language development, and academic achievement. Missouri should become one of the few states to provide this insurance coverage to children from working families.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Moore; Missouri School of the Deaf; and Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that mandating insurance coverage for hearing aids and related devices will result in higher insurance premiums paid by enrollees. Enrollees should share some of the costs associated with purchasing hearing aids and devices, and health insurers should be given the option to provide this coverage.

Testifying against the bill were Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Missouri; Group Health Plans; and Missouri Association of Health Plans.

Joseph Deering, Legislative Analyst